

# Department of Justice

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## **ATTORNEY GENERAL GONZALES ANNOUNCES ENHANCED PROGRAMS TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

### ***Human Trafficking Task Force and Alliance to Include Federal, State and Local Law Enforcement, along with Non-Governmental and Community Organizations***

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales today announced additional funding, totaling nearly \$900,000, for law enforcement agencies and service organizations in the Western District of New York for the purpose of identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking and apprehending and prosecuting those engaged in trafficking offenses. The funding will be used to establish a new Human Trafficking Task Force in the Western District of New York.

In October 2006, Buffalo became one of 10 cities around the country to receive funding for a Human Trafficking Task Force, building on the current work of over 32 national task forces working as part of a collaborative effort among various Department of Justice components, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Labor and State, and national and community-based organizations to combat human trafficking. Specifically, the Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs awarded Erie County with \$450,000 for law enforcement purposes and the International Institute of Buffalo, N.Y. Inc. with \$449,708 for victims services.

Today's announcement was made during the Attorney General's visit to the Northern border. Attorney General Gonzales was joined in the announcement by United States Attorney Terrance P. Flynn of the Western District of New York.

"Human trafficking crimes victimize the vulnerable people in our society," said United States Attorney Terrance P. Flynn. "Even going back to the days of the Underground Railroad, the Western District of New York, because of its unique geographic location, has played an important role in rescuing human trafficking victims. Today, some of those same geographic factors, including our proximity to the border as well as our large influx of seasonal workers, make the region susceptible to the crimes of those who wish to victimize those who seek a better life in our great Country." According to Flynn, the grant money will allow law enforcement in the District to "hone their ability to identify and rescue trafficking victims, while also allowing us better to prosecute those responsible for human trafficking."

The Human Trafficking Task Force and Alliance (HTTFA) in the Western District of New York will seek to accomplish the following goals:

- Train first responders to identify potential victims of trafficking;
- Improve inter-agency coordination between local and federal law enforcement agencies;
- Make use of non-governmental organizations assisting victims and educating the public;
- Improve ways to treat and care for victims as material witnesses needed for prosecution; and
- Hold regional training conferences to discuss the problem and evaluate ways to identify trafficking victims and prosecute trafficking organizations

The Task Force will include federal and state law enforcement agencies focusing resources on the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking offenses. Law enforcement participants on the HTTFA will include the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the FBI, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Erie County Sheriff's Office, the Buffalo Police Department, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the Rochester Police Department and the New York State Police. These law enforcement agencies will also form an alliance with non-governmental organizations, including the International Institute of Buffalo, Catholic Charities and Farmworker's Legal Services to help identify and provide services to traumatized victims in various immigrant communities. Plans are currently underway to begin regional training conferences in January 2007 in Buffalo, Rochester and the Southern Tier of Western New York.

Increasing and prosecuting human trafficking has been a major priority of the Department of Justice. Under the direction of the Attorney General, the U.S. Attorneys and the Civil Rights Division have taken the lead in prosecuting human trafficking cases at the federal level. In fiscal year 2006, the Civil Rights Division, working with the various U.S. Attorneys' offices, initiated 167 investigations, charged 111 defendants in 32 cases and obtained 79 convictions involving human trafficking defendants which reflected more than a twofold increase in convictions over the previous year. In April 2006, the Department of Justice obtained two of the longest sentences ever imposed in a sex trafficking case—50 years each for two defendants in New Jersey. From fiscal years 2001 to 2005, as compared to fiscal years 1996 to 2000, the Justice Department's trafficking investigations have quadrupled, the number of defendants charged has tripled, and the number of defendants convicted has doubled.

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